

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ ЭРМИТАЖ  
РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК

# ХРИСТИАНСКИЙ ВОСТОКЪ

ТОМЪ 6 (XII)

НОВАЯ СЕРІЯ



ХВ

# ХРИСТИАНСКІЙ ВОСТОКЪ

СЕРІЯ, ПОСВЯЩЕННАЯ ИЗУЧЕНІЮ  
ХРИСТИАНСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ НАРОДОВЪ АЗІИ И АФРИКИ

ТОМЪ 6 (XII)

НОВАЯ СЕРІЯ



ХВ

FOLK SPONTANEITY AND PSEUDO-TERETISMATA  
IN EAST-SYRIAC SOGHIYĀTHĀ: RESURRECTION,  
JOSEPH AND HIS MISTRESS, ‘TELL ME CHURCH!’,  
MOSES AND JESUS, AND GREAT ROME

A literary genre can be defined by the interplay of different parameters, such as form, range of content, social function, media of transmission, reception and preservation. All parameters allow a certain degree of synchronic and diachronic variation. The Syriac poetic genre of the *soghithā* is a special form of the classical stanzaic hymn (*madrāshā*) and consists of a series of four-line verses (quatrains), made up of seven syllable lines. Verses are often connected by an alphabetic acrostic – each or a couple of verses begin with a letter of the alphabet – and – from the 9th century, but especially in the late period (13th–20th centuries) – the line-endings within each verse generally rhyme.

The better-known and most extensively published texts are the dialogic *soghiyāthā*, where normally two, but sometimes more, characters discuss specific subjects in alternating verses or couple of verses (Brock 2011: 337)<sup>2</sup>. As far as function is concerned, *soghiyāthā* are liturgical hymns, but the variation over time and space of their liturgical use in Syriac Churches has not yet been sufficiently described<sup>3</sup>. They were and are transmitted in vocal form, sung by soloists or alternating choirs, to specific melodies – sometimes annotated in the rubrics by referring to the melody of another hymn – and anonymously preserved in liturgical manuscripts. As is

<sup>1</sup> Luca B. Ricossa is the author of the musical transcription of the first verse of ‘Tell me Church!’ and suggested the technical comments on melodies and performances: see especially the paragraphs immediately preceding and following the musical transcription and notes 20 and 36. The authors are grateful to Pier Giorgio Borbone (Pisa), Kristian S. Heal (BYU, Provo, UT), David G. Malick (Chicago, IL), Corrado Martone, Mary McCann, and Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti (Turin) for their help and insightful comments.

<sup>2</sup> There are also monologue *soghiyāthā*, like the lullaby that Mary sang to her baby in Bethlehem (Mengozzi 2006a) or the *soghithā* of *Joseph and his Brothers* mentioned here, *infra*. The *soghithā* appears therefore as the favourite genre for representing any kind of direct speech in a poetic form.

<sup>3</sup> A remarkable exception is the late East-Syriac – both Assyrian and Chaldean – dramatic representation of the *soghithā* of *The Cherub and the Thief*, that has been described in Pennacchietti (1993: 5–7) and Brock (2002: 173–4). Various performances, sung or sung and recited, are now on YouTube: see, e.g., [www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-Qz98XKFjY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-Qz98XKFjY&feature=related) (Detroit); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8oQnwNm3ts&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8oQnwNm3ts&feature=related) (Bruxelles, St Josse, 2009; Neo-Aramaic text B, published by Pennacchietti 1993); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ1TPJ6Cm\\_g&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ1TPJ6Cm_g&feature=related) (Syria, 2010); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHbMOIY4MaE&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHbMOIY4MaE&feature=related) (St Joseph Catholic Church, Sydney, 2012).

customary in literary works intended for oral transmission and therefore circulated in oral forms, they are sometimes preserved in versions that differ considerably from one another. Those to be sung by alternating choirs have sometimes been split up and preserved – or lost – “even” verses in one manuscript and “odd” verses in another (Brock 1984: 38–9).

East-Syriac collections of *soghiyāthā* for the various divisions and festivities of the liturgical year have been preserved in rather late – mainly 19th century – manuscripts or sections of manuscripts, sometimes entitled *Book of Soghiyatha*. Baumstark (1922: 303–4, n. 1) lists a number of these collections and observes that they contain old texts as well as new compositions, often characterized by *volkstümliche Frische* ‘folk spontaneity’. He seems to suggest that the new compositions, some of which might turn out to be adaptations of old poetic material to the forms and taste of a later time,<sup>4</sup> may date from the 13th-century *Nachblüte* ‘late blooming’<sup>5</sup> and, more in general, from the ‘reawakening’ (*ibidem*: 302) of East Syriac poetry or *Renaissance* (*ibidem*: 285) of Eastern Christian cultures (Teule 2010).

Liturgical texts are usually anonymous, but, as was the custom in late poetry, some of the East-Syriac *soghiyāthā* are attributed to specific authors, such as the famous Gewargis Warda and Khamis bar Qardaḥe (probably 13th century) – whose hymns and poems have also been collected in dedicated ‘song books’ (Mengozi 2011) – or the lesser-known and later ‘Aṭṭaye bar Atheli (Baumstark 1922: 332), the priest George of Alqosh or Joseph Metropolitan of Gazarta (*ibidem*: 335).

The composition and history of the various collections of East Syriac *soghiyāthā* have not yet been thoroughly investigated<sup>6</sup>. As a first, partial contribution to their literary study, the focus of this paper will be on short hymns, in which the rhythmical repetition of formulae creates an easy, transparent textual structure and a jingle-like effect within the texts. They probably exemplify the popular flavour that Baumstark recognizes as characteristic of late East-Syriac *soghiyāthā* at its highest level. Their

<sup>4</sup> This adaptation of earlier texts to new forms, influenced by Persian poetry, have been observed in Warda’s reworking of Narsai’s poems (Pritula 2009). Similarly, dispute *soghiyāthā* proper (e.g., the *Dispute of the Months* and *Gold and Wheat*), that represent the continuation in Classical Syriac and Modern Aramaic of the ancient Mesopotamian (Sumerian and Babylonian) genre of dispute dialogues, have found their way and probably a new form in the late collections of *soghiyāthā* (see the use of the ms. Cambridge Add 2820 in Brock 1985) and in the *Book of Khamis bar Qardaḥe* (Mengozi, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Instead of *Nachtblüte* ‘night blooming’ (Baumstark 1922: 303, l. 2), I prefer to read *Nachblüte* ‘late’ or ‘second blooming’, as in the fourth last line on the same page 303, where Baumstark speaks of the *soghiyāthā* genre and its influence on the emerging genre of the ‘*onithā*’.

<sup>6</sup> Late *soghiyāthā* represent an autonomous and original stage in the history of the genre and should be published and studied as such, trying to give an aesthetic interpretation, beyond the stemmatic value, to the principle *recentiores non deteriores*. It is at the core of Pasquali’s (1934) legacy to post-lachmannian philologists that the history of transmission – and the study of both early and late historical contexts of transmission – is as relevant and fascinating as the reconstruction of the archetype or the earliest possible witness of a text.



I went to look in Jerusalem and they told me:  
 'Look for him in Sion!'  
 I went to look in Sion and they told me:  
 'Look for Him in the Upper Chamber!'<sup>9</sup>  
 I went to look in the Upper Chamber and they told me:  
 'Go up to Heaven!'  
 I went to look in Heaven and they told me:  
 'Look for Him on the Throne!'<sup>10</sup>  
 I went to look on the Throne and they told me:  
 'Look for Him at the right hand of His father!'  
 I went to look at the right hand of His father and they told me:  
 'He is a perfect human being!'

The traditional stanzaic structure of the *soghithā* is here simplified in a set of ten couplets of seven-syllable lines. Each couplet opens with the formula 'I went to look', the second hemistich with the formula 'they told me'. The point is that Christ is not to be found anywhere, but on the right hand of the Father, where he nevertheless appears as 'a perfect human being'. It is a playful, almost child-like, chain of postponements that creates a kind of climax, towards a closing Christological formula that is perhaps a rather disappointing conclusion for a modern Western reader.

#### JOSEPH AND HIS MISTRESS

In the manuscript, bi-colour series such as *lā lā lā lā lā lā lā lā*, written in red and black ink alternately, are literally eye-catching. One is reminded of the teretisma (lit. 'chirruping'), series of non-sense syllables in use since the 14th century for the chanting of Byzantine hymns in the context of the so-called kalophonic style. Lingas (1996) links the emergence of embellished or kalophonic chant with hesychastic spirituality and mysticism. Ascetics would spend weekdays in the practice of silent meditation (hesychasm) and 'return to the community to help celebrate an all-night vigil that was dominated by the most elaborate chant that Byzantium had ever produced' (*ibi*: 167)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly the place where the Last Supper was held.

<sup>10</sup> Classical Syriac *'arsā* means 'bed' or 'Little Bear'. However, here it seems to be used with the meaning of Arabic *'arṣ* 'throne'. In Persian the term also more specifically refers to 'the Throne of God' (Steingass 1892: 842–3).

<sup>11</sup> Byzantine teretismata usually follow highly ornamented melodic patterns and, especially in the later period, are sometimes descriptive, being used to imitate the sounds of an instrument (bell, trumpet ...) or the calls of animals (cicadas, swallows...; Conomos 1991). Lingas (1996: 165) publishes an example of teretisma (*to-to-to-to te-re-re*) added by Koukouzeles, one of the leading figures of the 14th-century kalophonic style, as an ornamental coda of a text for the Mother of God, and defines it as an 'episode of institutionalized pentecostalism' (*ibi*: 163).

In late Byzantine hymnody teretismata serve to prolong the melody of a hymn and form independent melodic unities called kratemata (lit. ‘grips, supports’),<sup>12</sup> in which composers or singers can give free rein to their creativity or virtuosity:

Interpolated sections with these nonsense syllables occurred in many of the liturgical texts of Byzantine chants of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries and even the neo-Byzantine era. It was in these interpolations with nonsense syllables that composers had the freedom to concentrate on the musical style of the chant and not the relationship of melody to text (Touliatos 1989: 240)<sup>13</sup>.

However, in the two East-Syriac *soghiyāthā* that contain these *lā lā lā lā* interludes, musical and textual functions are not disjoined. They are closer to the stuttering of Pa Pa Pa Pageno than to the trills of the Queen of the Night. The repetition of the monosyllabic word *lā* ‘no, not’ certainly sustain the melodic ornaments and melismatic frills of the singer, but they play an important role at the textual level too, in that they stress both firmness and the emotional content of a refusal<sup>14</sup>.

A short *soghiyāthā* on *Joseph and His Mistress* provides an instance of this. The text belongs to a cycle of *soghiyāthā* on Joseph that the manuscript links to the Sundays of Moses, the penultimate division of seven weeks (*šāvo’ā*) of the East-Syriac liturgical calendar: a *soghiyāthā* on *Joseph and his Brothers*, in which the patriarch recounts the dreams he had (Genesis 37), is assigned to the First Sunday of Moses; the long dialogue of *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife* (Joseph and Potiphar’s wife II in Brock, 1991: 117) and the short *soghiyāthā* published here are assigned to the Second – although the rubric heading of the latter does not specify for which ‘Sunday of St Moses’ the shorter text is intended; the *soghiyāthā* of *Joseph and his brother Benjamin* (Joseph and Benjamin in Brock’s list, *ibidem*) is assigned to the Third Sunday of Moses; five other shorter *soghiyāthā* on Joseph follow, seemingly of narrative

<sup>12</sup> Being melodic additions, often optional codas added to existing texts, Byzantine kratemata are reminiscent of Gregorian sequences, melodies without words that prolong and elaborate the closing of a halleluia. Latin sequences emerged between the 8th and 10th centuries, but unlike Greek kratemata were later substituted by poetic texts as supports for melismatic expansions and embellishments (Nankova 2007: 17, 25, with references).

<sup>13</sup> Traditional performers of Syriac music do recur to non-sense syllables as metrical fillers and supports for the melody. Jeannin (1924: 31) notices their use among Chaldean singers of Telkepe (northern Iraq) and they can be clearly heard in at least two of the performances of *The Cherub and the Thief* (Neo-Aramaic text B, published by Pennacchietti 1993), uploaded in YouTube. *Eye, eyo* at the end of verse lines in: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bz9b3NxxKiY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bz9b3NxxKiY&feature=related) (no information available); and *eynga* in [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc22jbmVqUo&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc22jbmVqUo&feature=relmfu) (Alqosh, northern Iraq).

Jeannin (1924: 29) labels as Syriac teretismata what, according to his description, would in fact seem to be melismata, i.e. ornamental variation and repetition of notes on prolonged vowels.

<sup>14</sup> Like teretismata, the repetition of words and phrases to support melismatic embellishments is also part of the Byzantine kalophonic style (Lingas 1996: 163–4).





For the Sunday of St Moses and it is on Joseph and his mistress

1. The infatuated woman saw Joseph's beauty  
and began to devise cunning plots.  
No no no no! I will not do your will!
2. If you consent and do my will,  
I will make you king of Egypt.  
No no no no! I will not do your will!
3. If you fear Potiphar,  
I will give him a mortal venom to drink.  
No no no no! I will not do your will!
4. And if you fear the Lord,  
I will offer Him prayer and fasting.  
No no no no! I will not do your will!
5. God forbid, I swear to you,  
oh infatuated woman, I will not do it.  
No no no no! I will not do your will!

The verses are composed of a couplet of eight-syllable lines and a rather long refrain of uncertain meter. The first verse is narrative, whereas in the following three verses Potiphar's wife seeks to seduce Joseph with various arguments. The last verse contains Joseph's full answer. His refusal is the refrain repeated at the end of each verse and contains the pseudo-teretisma *lā lā lā lā*. The number of *lā* syllables varies from verse to verse (24, 28, 22, 22, 21 in Baghdad ChE 6) and it seems to be determined by graphical rather than metrical requirements. The scribe prefers to write complete lines of *lā lā lā lā* rather than write down the exact number of syllables. This is confirmed by the copy of this text preserved in the ms. Cambridge Add. 2820 (AD 1882) 75a, where the number of *lās* per verse is much more irregular than in Baghdad ChE 6, but every *lā lā lā lā* cluster fills a whole line.

As in much other Joseph literature,<sup>18</sup> the beautiful, chaste patriarch seems to have no arguments against the assaults of the woman and his repeated no's help to compensate for his poor or total lack of dialectic.

<sup>18</sup> On the vast literature on Joseph in Classical Syriac and beyond, see Heal (2007, 2008), with further bibliographical references. On the literary value of this particular short text and the traditional origin of the arguments the woman uses, see K.S. Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, Brigham Young University: 213–4.

## TELL ME CHURCH!

Both the Western and Eastern Syriac liturgical traditions celebrate in and around November a period of two to four weeks called *quddāš ʿēdṭā* ‘Dedication (consecration) of the Church’. For West-Syrians the two or three weeks of Dedication mark the beginning of the liturgical year, just before Advent (*subārā*, lit. ‘Annunciation’), whereas East-Syrians celebrate four weeks of Dedication as the last *šāvoʿā* (lit. a division of ‘seven’ weeks) of their liturgical calendar. It is not clear whether it is the commemoration of the dedication of a specific church – the churches of Edessa (Baumstark, King), Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Maclean), the *anastasis* of Jerusalem (Black) have been proposed as candidates – or of all local churches. Building on an intuition by Black (1954), Botte (1957) suggests that it could be seen as a Christian response to the Jewish celebration of the 2nd-century BC rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem (Hanukkah). The festival would have originated in Palestine and been preserved among Syrian Christians, where it lost its original polemical meaning, was included in the liturgical calendars and variously interpreted. Probably, as soon as the liturgical recurrence acquired symbolical meaning, it became less relevant to clearly distinguish between the celebration of a specific important church of the past and the local church, both interpreted as historic or actual manifestations of the one spiritual Church, the heavenly and earthly community of believers.

In the cycle of *soghiyāthā* for the East-Syriac celebration of the four weeks of Dedication, we have a text that contains the same pseudo-teretisma *lā lā lā lā* as in the Joseph text and its positive counterpart *ʿēn ʿēn* ‘yes yes’. In our ms. the text is split up and each verse is copied as the first verse of the hymns to be sung on the various Sundays. Moreover, it is interrupted after the third verse, corresponding to the Third Sunday of Dedication<sup>19</sup>. In other manuscripts (Vat Sir 188 73a-b, Cambridge Add. 2820 90a-b) it is copied as a separate text on its own. The Cambridge manuscript omits the fourth verse and assigns each verse to one of the Sundays of Dedication.

The Classical Syriac text published here is reconstructed on the basis of the one chanted by Noel Farman, a Chaldean priest who was born in Iraq and is now serving at the St Mary Church and the francophone Parish Sainte-Famille in Calgary (Alberta, Canada). His performance, entitled *im-mar lee* (*sic*, hyphen included), is available on YouTube as the soundtrack of a number of videos, uploaded in February 2012, that propose the transliteration and translation of the hymn in various alphabets and languages: Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and probably more<sup>20</sup>.

The text must be very popular among Assyrians and I was able to find three other recordings of the Classical Syriac text chanted with the same basic melody, but

<sup>19</sup> Baghdad ChE 6 151–152 and 153–154. I have not been able to check directly on the manuscript, but it is clear that a number of pages (probably 8) of the 9th quire – between the slides 153–154 and 155–156 – have not been photographed.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g.: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7eKhUrOxHw&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7eKhUrOxHw&feature=relmfu) (Arabic); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKJulaoNfNM&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKJulaoNfNM&feature=relmfu) (English); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jK60kmJN-teU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jK60kmJN-teU) (Spanish); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mA65qGKKwk&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mA65qGKKwk&feature=relmfu) (Dutch).

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<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to a student of mine, Harir Sherkat, for drawing my attention to this modern version, included in a Cd that was given to her by Mar Narsai Benjamin, Assyrian bishop of Teheran.

<sup>24</sup> I have tried to represent the Neo-Aramaic text in a traditional, phonological – only occasionally etymological – transliteration in Syriac script, perhaps closer to Iraqi scribal conventions than standard Urmi. On the other hand, the pronunciation of the singer, Gerand Lazar, is based on Urmi Aramaic (Assyrian): e.g., the first words sound something like *mūrri ya ‘iṯa eyka bāsma lax banənnax*, ‘stars’ are *k’oxwe*, and ‘the moon will not show its light’ is *sahra le maghze bahre*.

<sup>26</sup> Lazar pronounces it as *bəsmā* wherever it occurs.

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<sup>28</sup> Cambridge Add. 2820: **مكتبة**.

<sup>29</sup> The fourth verse is missing in Cambridge Add. 2820 and in the text performed by Linda George and Lazar. Nevertheless, I propose a Neo-Aramaic translation of that verse too.

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1. Tell me, Church, where do you want me to build you.  
Shall I build you, shall I build you on the sun?  
No no no no, since it is said, oh yeah, it is said in the Scriptures  
that the sun, its rays will be extinguished<sup>31</sup>.
2. Tell me, Church, where do you want me to build you.  
Shall I build you, shall I build you on the moon?  
No no no no, since it is said, oh yeah, it is said in the Scriptures  
that the moon will not give its light<sup>32</sup>.
3. Tell me, Church, where do you want me to build you.  
Shall I build you, shall I build you on the stars?  
No no no no, since it is said, oh yeah, it is said in the Scriptures  
that the stars will fall like leaves<sup>33</sup>.
4. Tell me, Church, where do you want me to build you.  
Shall I build you, shall I build you on the mountains?  
No no no no, since it is said, oh yeah, it is said in the Scriptures  
that the mountains will melt like wax<sup>34</sup>.
5. Tell me, Church, where do you want me to build you.  
Shall I build you, shall I build you on the rock?  
Yes, oh yes, since it is said, oh yeah, it is said in the Scriptures  
that I shall build my Church on the Rock<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Cambridge Add. 2820 and text sung by Linda George: ܐܢܬܐ, as in the parable of the house on the rock (Matthew 7: 24); Barkho Oshana sings ܐܢܬܐ, as in the Neo-Aramaic version.

<sup>31</sup> Possibly a reference to Joshua 10:13 or prophetic texts such as Isaiah 13:10, 30:26, 60:19, Joel 2:10.

<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 13:10, quoted in Matthew 24:29.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 34:4.

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 97:5; Micha 1:4.

<sup>35</sup> Mathew 16:18.

It is not clear what the metrical structure of the composition is. Since the classical and modern texts are chanted according to approximately the same melody, the number of syllables per melodic units appears to be irrelevant. The continuous ornamental variation – *fleuritures de circonstance*, as Jeannin (1924: 34) describes it –, and the changes of tone and melodic patterns from one verse to another – as is customary in the performances of traditional singers – make it rather difficult to transcribe the melody<sup>36</sup>. The following transcription of the first verse of the hymn as it is chanted by Farman is somewhat simplified, especially as regards the ornamentation, but it reproduces faithfully the basic structure of the melody.

Emar li e - ta ey - ka tssawy - at dewnikh ew - ni  
 ew - ni ew - nikh ewnikh 'al shi - m - sha  
 la la la la la la la la  
 la la dammir wammir  
 wammir wammir dammir wammir ba - g - to -  
 we dshimsha da - 'kin za - li - qao

The insistence on the fourth degree – here C – is typical of the Syriac Mode 2 (Husman 1971: 166), but especially as it is performed by Farman,<sup>37</sup> the melody has a number of features, such as the lowering of the second degree – here A – towards the final note, which recalls one of the Neo-Byzantine Mode 1.

<sup>36</sup> As Jeannin (1924: 4) brilliantly puts it: ‘si les transcriptions de mélodies orientales ne sont jamais, selon la pittoresque expression de Rebours, qu’un «tableau sans ombres», il vaut encore mieux avoir ce tableau sans ombres, que pas de tableau du tout’.

<sup>37</sup> Barkho Oshana takes the melody a tone higher at each verse, but at a certain point he has to go back to the tone of the first verse. However, he never lowers the second degree, in keeping with the rule of Syriac Mode 2.

In the third verse – that in the ms. Baghdad ChE 6 (153–154 left) introduces the hymn for the Third Sunday of Dedication – double strokes on the final syllable of the words *evnēkh* ‘I shall build you’ and *ammīr* ‘it is said’ and single strokes on the *lā lā lā lā* series would seem to indicate where the performer is expected to prolong the vowels and sing them with embellishments<sup>38</sup>. Double strokes are written in red ink on words written in black and in black ink on words written in red. Aesthetic-graphical concerns seem to prevail here, again, over accuracy and the double strokes are also marked on the last pair of *ammīrs*, which Farman sings with a different rhythm but with no special embellishment.



In commenting on the hymn, Bishop Sarhad Yawsip Jammo (2007) correctly points out that it is not clear who is actually addressing his questions to the Church. It cannot be Jesus, since He must know the right answer, which is given in the last verse. On the other hand, the answers of the Church, containing the pseudo-teretismatic formulae, clearly demonstrates that She is well-versed in the Bible and can thus contrast the paradoxical locations where the mysterious interlocutor proposes to build Her: sun, moon, stars, mountains.

As in the short *soghithā* for Resurrection, the riddle-like questioning serves to build up a climax, stress the importance of the Bible in solving problems and focus on the final solution. The pseudo-teretismata *lā lā* vs *hē hē* concur in isolating and underlining the importance of the final verse. The first locations are refused on the basis of Old Testament quotations or allusions, whereas in the final verse the solution comes from the New Testament. This is the only trace of the polemic with the Jews, that has been supposed to have given rise to the feast of Dedication of the Church and that would surface in a much later composition: only the Gospel can give sure and positive indication on where to build a temple. In the Neo-Aramaic version, the final, correct hypothesis is given even more prominence, by repeating the Gospel quotation

<sup>38</sup> Husmann (1974: 375) describes a similar rudimentary and partial system of melodic notation as used in the notebook of his Syrian Orthodox informant: ‘Als hervorragende Kostbarkeit entdeckte ich in Kriakos Toumas Büchlein zunächst über besonderen Silben schräg nach links aufsteigende Doppelreihen von Punkten bzw. kurzen Strichlein, von denen Kriakos Touma erläuterte, daß sie andeuteten, daß dort größere Melismen zu singen wären.’

twice: the first time the modern term *qāyā*, ultimately derived from Turkish, is used for ‘rock’, whereas the second time the classical term *kēpā* is used<sup>39</sup>.

# MOSES AND JESUS

The confrontation of the Old and New Testaments is more explicit in a *soghithā* that the ms. Baghdad ChE 6 assigns to the Second Sunday of Dedication. In the first verse, a mysterious character questions the Church about whether She loves Moses or Jesus more. The following verses give the answers of the Church.

- [illegible]

<sup>39</sup> The use of bi- or multi-lingual synonyms in hendiadys or in parallel lines is a customary feature in Neo-Aramaic poetry and can be considered as a literary reflection of the rich linguistic repertoire of the authors and their audiences (Mengozi 2002: 100–01).

<sup>40</sup> Baghdad ChE 6 153–154; the same text is preserved in Cambridge 87a–88a and Vat Sir 188 75b–(77b?).



1. Show me, show me, Church!  
Show me and disclose to me whether you love Moses or Jesus.
2. I love Moses, since God spoke to him,<sup>41</sup>  
but I worship Jesus, because His Father attested: 'He is my beloved!'<sup>42</sup>.
3. I love Moses, who procured manna in the desert,<sup>43</sup>  
but I worship Jesus, Who offered me His body instead of manna<sup>44</sup>.
4. I love Moses, who set up a tent in the desert<sup>45</sup>,  
but I worship Jesus, Who instead of a tent built for me a church.
5. I love Moses, who brought the people out of Egypt,  
but I worship Jesus, who saved mankind from error.
6. I love Moses, since signs were made with his hands<sup>46</sup>,  
but I worship Jesus, Who made all creatures rejoice.
7. I love Moses, who wrote the laws on the tablets,  
but I worship Jesus, Who engraved me in the Father's heart.
8. I love Moses, who appointed many leaders of thousands<sup>47</sup>,  
but I worship Jesus, Who ordained bishops for me.
9. I love Moses, who let me cross the sea as on dry land<sup>48</sup>,  
but I worship Jesus, who gave me baptism in the Jordan with the Holy Spirit<sup>49</sup>.
10. I love Moses, since a cloud descended upon him,<sup>50</sup>  
but I worship Jesus, since the Holy Ghost descended upon Him<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 33:11.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 3:17 and parallels.

<sup>43</sup> Exodus 16:13.

<sup>44</sup> Probably reminiscent of John 6:49–51.

<sup>45</sup> Numbers 1:1.

<sup>46</sup> Exodus 4: 17, 7:9 etc.

<sup>47</sup> Exodus 18:25.

<sup>48</sup> Exodus 14.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew 3:11 and parallels.

<sup>50</sup> Exodus 24:18?

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 3:16 and parallels.

The formulae 'I love Moses... but I worship Jesus' are the structuring skeleton of this composition and form the six-syllable first hemistichs of each line, whereas the second hemistichs are regular seven-syllable lines.

## GREAT ROME

In a *soghithā* for the feast of St Peter and Paul, we find the same rhetorical structure – a question in the first verse and answers given in the following ones – as in the text on Moses and Jesus and part of the opening formula of the hymn ‘Tell me Church!’

سُجَّدًا دَقِيقَةً وَقَلِيلَةً<sup>52</sup>

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### Another *soghithā* for Peter and Paul

‘ Tell me, Rome, where do they build your walls?  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!

<sup>52</sup> Baghdad ChE 6 29–30.

- b.* My walls are in the seas and strong are my buildings.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- g.* My armies are heroic and strong are my kings.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- d.* I look like the sun, the moon and the stars.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- h.* Behold, two master-builders are placed as guards!  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- w.* And there the Cross still stands as the everlasting guard.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- z.* I am victorious through Its strength over all my enemies.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- h.* The heavenly king prepared for me a banquet.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!
- t.* I am much stronger and I am victorious over all kings.  
Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome Rome, Great Rome!

The metrical form of the text as it is preserved in the ms. Baghdad ChE 6 is not regular: most lines and the refrain – except where it occurs first – have ten syllables. The first time the refrain occurs and in lines *b* and *w* there are eleven syllables. The refrain contains the curious pseudo-teretisma *r(h)om*, a rarely-used form of the word for ‘Rome’ and the ‘Roman Empire’, and the vocative, *r(h)omē rabtha* ‘Great Rome’<sup>53</sup>.

The exaltation of Rome’s military superiority seems to prevail over all poetic and hagiographic motifs. The two apostles are master-builders placed as guards of the city, which however is forever protected by the Cross. The text appears thus to allude to Constantine’s victory and confirms the rather strong sympathy of East Syrians, especially in the later period, for Rome and Roman – Latin-Frankish, but to some extent also Byzantine – Christianity (Mengozzi 2006b: 354–5 and 2010: 194, with references).

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<sup>53</sup> On various forms and meanings of the Syriac terms for ‘Rome’ and ‘Roman’, see Pennacchietti (2011).

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